Brideshead Revisited through the Years
Between Religion and Relationships from Novel to Screen

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ABSTRACT
Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) has been adapted on-screen twice: as a series in 1981 and as a film in 2008. Even though all three versions present the audience with the same fabula, Charles's (sexual) orientation has been approached differently over the years. Whereas Waugh's 1945 novel leaves the issue of sexuality unaddressed and focuses on Charles's conversion to Christianity instead, the 1981 series portrays a homosexual tension between Charles and Sebastian, and the 2008 film foregrounds the heterosexual, or even heteronormative relationship between Charles and Julia. Hence, this paper shows that sexuality is a social construction that changes over time, and in doing so offers a corrective view regarding the prevailing belief that society has become more sexually tolerant over the years.

Keywords
Brideshead Revisited, adaptation, sexuality, religion, narratology, close-reading, comparative analysis.

INTRODUCTION
Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) introduces its protagonist, thirty-nine year old Captain Charles Ryder, during the 1940s looking back on his days as an Oxford student when he met Sebastian and Julia Flyte, whose privileged family lived in a glorious estate called Brideshead. Stationed by chance at the now dilapidated manor house twenty years after the events unfolded, the mere sight of the desolate estate reminds him of the magical summer he spent there in the 1920s. At this point, the primary story, which takes place during Charles's army-years in the 1940s, gives way to the embedded story, which takes place during his Oxford years in the 1920s. As the character-bound narrator of both the primary and the embedded story, Charles retells the events and his experience from memory.

Even though the 1981 series and the 2008 film have adopted essentially the same fabula, Charles's main focus of (sexual) desire is approached differently throughout the years in different media. A comparative analysis within the framework of Mieke Bal's narrative theory shows how the embedded narrative in the 1945 novel concentrates on Charles's religious conversion instead of the issue of sexuality itself; it presents Charles's homoerotic friendship with Sebastian as the forerunner for his heterosexual relationship with Julia, which in turn serves as the ultimate forerunner for his relationship with God. This religious centrality shifts towards a focus on homosexual tension between Charles and Sebastian in the 1981 series adaptation, and towards a focus on Charles and Julia's heteronormative relationship in the 2008 film adaptation.

The novel and its on-screen adaptations have not yet been analysed in comparison to each other within the framework of sexuality in spite of its social relevance: the most recent adaptation presents its audience with a heterosexual norm that was present neither in the novel nor in the series. Moreover, the analysis between the three versions displays sexuality in general not as a fixed notion, but as a social construction that is approached differently in various media and times. In addition, the analysis of the film specifically stresses how an adaptation of a canonical work such as *Brideshead* challenges the assumption that our society has become more tolerant with respect to non-normative sexual preferences over the years. Several film critics have observed a new, heterosexual focus in the 2008 adaptation, but this idea has never been elaborated on within the field of academia. So, in the end, an analysis of all three versions in relation to each other is socially relevant because it questions our collective image about the perception of sexuality in general, and academically relevant because the idea of heteronormativity in the film has never been substantiated before within a theoretical framework. Hence, analysing *Brideshead* through the years opens up the opportunity to disclose various interpretations of the same fabula through different forms of media during distinct periods of time.

THE 1945 NOVEL: A RELIGIOUS APPROACH
Since its first publication in 1945, the novel has been analysed from many different points of view, including a critical-heritage perspective (e.g. Coffey, Rothstein) and an art-historical perspective (e.g. Koziol, Manganiello). It is, however, its religiousness that has dominated most academic analyses and pieces of literary criticism, since all major characters are presented as either fervently practicing or (re)converted Catholics, including Charles. I therefore argue that Charles's homoerotic friendship with Sebastian is presented as the forerunner for his heterosexual relationship with Julia, which in turn functions as the precursor for Charles's conversion to Christianity. Hence, the novel's main goal is not to establish Charles's homoerotic or heterosexual interest (both relationships ultimately fail in their own ways, after all), but to connect Charles to two romantic storylines, one homoerotic and one heterosexual, in order to show the insignificant nature of the question of sexuality itself.

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The First Forerunner: Sebastian

Throughout the embedded story, Charles first becomes infatuated with his extravagant friend Sebastian. Whereas Coppa argues that Anthony Blanche, one of Sebastian's openly homosexual friends, is generally considered to be "the voice […] of homosexuality" (159) and "the novel's only committed and unashamed homosexual" (160), one could also argue there to be homoerotic tension between Charles and Sebastian. Charles's sexual orientation in the novel has been much discussed within academic literature since "Charles leaves sizable gaps in describing his feelings for Sebastian" (Christensen 139). While Christensen argues that "Charles is not [same-sex oriented]" (145), "[t]here seems no doubt that the characters' tie is homosocial, that Charles is homo-erotically attracted to Sebastian, and that their relationship is homosexual," according to Higdon (83). They are even "mistaken" for a homosexual couple at the Old Hundredth bar when two girls "thought [they] were fairies when [they] came in" (Waugh 106).

The Second Forerunner: Julia

According to Christensen, "Sebastian was the forerunner who introduced [Charles] to Catholicism" (150), while in fact, Sebastian is presented as the precursor for Charles's heterosexual relationship with Julia:

> "Why did you marry her [Celia]?"
> "[…] Loneliness, missing Sebastian."
> "You loved him, didn't you?"
> "Oh yes. He was the forerunner."
> Julia understood.
> (Waugh 240)

After his homoerotic friendship with Sebastian, Charles engages in a heterosexual affair with Julia while he is still married to his wife Celia, which results in a relationship between Charles and Julia. To Charles, however, "the interest [in her] was keener [than her interest in him], for there was always the physical likeness between brother and sister" (Waugh 167). It is thus "Julia [who] is literally Sebastian revisited: […] it is difficult not to see Charles revisiting his male love in a socially acceptable female form" (Coppa 161). On the boat from New York to London Charles and Julia are mistakenly perceived as "[being] man and wife" (Waugh 237) in the same way that Charles and Sebastian were considered a couple before. After they return to Brideshead, Julia brings up the topic of "forerunners" again:

> "It's frightening," Julia once said, "to think how completely you have forgotten Sebastian."
> "He was the forerunner."
> "That's what you said in the storm. I've thought since, perhaps I am only a forerunner too."
> (Waugh 284)

Julia is right; unlike Christensen's statement that Sebastian is the forerunner for Charles's religious conversion, Julia is more likely to fulfil this function since she is the one who eventually cancels her marriage with Charles because she thinks that "starting a life with [Charles] [would mean starting a life] without [God]" (Waugh 319).

The Ultimate Goal: Religion

Charles's homoerotic friendship with Sebastian is presented as the forerunner for his heterosexual relationship with Julia, which in turn functions as the precursor for Charles's religious conversion. Therefore, the novel's main goal is not to establish Charles's homoerotic or heterosexual interest, but to emotionally connect Charles to two different romantic storylines in order to show the insignificant nature of the question of sexuality itself. In the end, the ultimate achievement in life is not to find love within a (homoerotic or heterosexual) relationship, but to find a connection with God.

THE 1981 SERIES: A HOMOSEXUAL APPROACH

On 12 October 1981, thirty-six years after the novel was published, the first episode of the Granada TV-series, comprising eleven episodes in total, aired. It adopts the same narrative structure as the novel, but, as critics have also noted, the series "is, in part, a compelling and moving paean to the bond that keeps males attached to and affected by each other for years on end" (O'Toole 78) and the creators have "flatten[ed] Waugh's delicate account of friendship into a nudging homosexual story" (Greenfield 76). I too argue that Charles's homosexual interest gains a more prominent place in the series than in the novel. Whereas the nature of sexuality is shown to be subordinate to the influence of religion in the novel, the series displays a homosexual focus in Charles regarding Sebastian. Directors Michael Lindsay-Hogg and Charles Sturridge create a more openly homosexual atmosphere between the two main male characters through the carefully staged introduction of Sebastian as well as through meaningful omissions of scenes and passages that involve Julia.

Emphasizing Homosexuality: Sebastian

First, emphasis on Charles's homosexual interest is achieved through the carefully staged introduction of Sebastian. The image of the young Sebastian in the series is shown before the image of the young Charles in the embedded story, whereas in the novel Charles introduces his younger self before he introduces Sebastian in the embedded story. The importance of Sebastian's character in the series can also be interpreted in terms of framing. Cardwell notes that Sebastian "stands in the sunlight, framed symmetrically by an archway, so that the arch and foreground are dark whilst his bright blond hair, pale clothes and faithful teddy-bear Aloysius are bathed in a gentle golden light" (126). According to Cardwell, Anthony Andrews's blond hair is "a deliberate addition to the on-screen Sebastian" (126) in order to reduce the physical likeness between brother and sister that the novel stresses. Together with the framed first image, it makes Sebastian the object of Charles's eroticized gaze. This first image of Sebastian is significant since it is character-bound focalized by Charles and therefore telling of his first impression of Sebastian, but also because "his striking appearance, enhanced considerably by the way in which the shot is arranged, and by its place within shots of buildings and black-robed students, emphasizes his importance, yet his difference from that which surrounds him" (Cardwell 126). His physical appearance and the mysterious aura that surrounds him are the exact features that attract Charles to Sebastian.

Emphasizing Homosexuality: Julia

Second, homosexual tension between Charles and Sebastian is achieved through the omission of parts of the novel's text and scenery concerning Julia, especially in the second half of the story, when she technically becomes a more prominent figure in the storyline than Sebastian. During the scenes that take place on the boat from New York to London, Charles's voice-over is notably silent when it comes to narrating his inner feelings for her. He does not utter that this is the place where "she and I, who were never friends before, met on terms of long and unbroken intimacy" (Waugh 222) nor that her beauty "could only be known […] in the love [he] was soon to have for her" (Waugh 223). When a storm causes the majority of the passengers to confine to their beds, including Charles's wife Celia, Charles's voice-over does not state, as he does in the novel, that "all night between dreaming and waking [he] thought of Julia" (Waugh 233). Moreover, an important passage is omitted from the series that takes place after Charles and Julia arrive back at Brideshead and announce their engagement. In this passage, Julia expresses how frightening it is "to think how completely [Charles has] forgotten about Sebastian" (Waugh 284). Instead, in the series, Charles immediately states that he "had not forgotten Sebastian" and tries to acquire information from Sebastian's other sister Cordelia. It suggests his ongoing interest in Sebastian, even though Sebastian has not been physically present for several episodes in a row and Charles is at this point engaged to Julia.

THE 2008 FILM: A HETERONORMATIVE APPROACH

Almost three decades after the 1981 series aired, a remake of *Brideshead Revisited*, directed by Julian Jarrold, was launched in cinemas in 2008. It does not follow the same narrative structure as the novel nor the series. As Bradshaw notes in *The Guardian*, several liberties were taken with the novel "to create a simplified, sexualised Julia-Sebastian-Charles love triangle." Apart from such observations in reviews, the idea of Charles and Julia engaging in a heteronormative relationship in this film has not yet been developed within the context of academic literature.

I argue that Charles's shift in sexual focus is mainly established through restructuring parts of the primary story as well as the embedded story. First, within the frame story, the transition from primary to embedded story is remodelled, which is most clearly visible in the "boat scene." Second, the embedded story is slightly restructured, which is most notable in the "Venice scene," causing the audience to direct their attention to Charles and Julia's heteronormative relationship.

Restructuring the Primary Story: Heterosexuality and the Boat Scene

Charles's heterosexual focus is established in the film through restructuring the transition from primary to embedded story: the boat scene from the end of the novel occurs immediately after the introduction to Charles's primary story in the film. Hence, the film creates a "bridge" or "semi-primary" narrative: instead of moving from the army scene in 1942 to the Oxford scenes in 1923, the audience is guided through the boat scene from the end of the novel in between the army and Oxford scenes. During this boat scene, which takes place in approximately 1936, Charles meets Julia, whom he has not seen since he last left Brideshead. The crucial effect of repositioning this scene as the semi-primary narrative is that Julia, in contrast to the novel and the series, is introduced to the audience before Sebastian, foregrounding her instead of Sebastian or religion. The first image of her face captured in full focus by the camera is framed by a symmetrical yet faded background, as she becomes the eroticized object of Charles's gaze – just like Sebastian in the 1981 series. Moreover, since the film returns to the boat scene at the end of the embedded story, this scene is granted a unique narrative status compared to the novel and the series. It visually reminds the audience of the semi-primary narrative from the beginning of the story, but technically belongs to the primary narrative that concludes the film. It is in this "second" boat scene that Charles is confronted with Anthony Blanche, who mentions during a conversion which was present neither in the novel nor the series that "it's Julia now, and it used to be Sebastian," suggesting that Charles cannot love both at the same time.

Restructuring the Embedded Story: Heteronormativity and the Venice Scene

The film also establishes Charles's heterosexual focus through restructuring the Venice scene in the embedded story, when Julia joins Charles and Sebastian during their visit to their father in Venice, whereas Charles and Sebastian travel to Venice without her in the novel and the series. The importance of the Venice scene is already announced early on in the film, when Sebastian is first introduced in a Venetian gondola together with Anthony Blanche – a scene that is again present neither in the novel nor in the series. Charles is in the middle of his cousin Jasper's guided tour around Oxford College when Anthony and Sebastian fern along. He stops to look at the two boys in the gondola, to which Jasper responds by saying that they are "sodomites, all of them." The choice of words in this added scene is peculiar since the term "sodomite" is, at least since the Oscar Wilde trials in 1895, mainly understood as a negative term for a homosexual man. Hence, this seemingly insignificant sentence uttered by Jasper preludes an underlying homophobic and inherently heteronormative tone in the film.

Once in Venice, the three of them attend a masked ball where Julia gets lost in the crowd. Charles goes out to look for her, just as he does during the boat scene, and when he finds her, he kisses her (which he does again when the boat scene continues at the end of the embedded story). Sebastian goes out to look for Charles, finding him together with his sister. Charles then faces a dilemma: to comfort either Sebastian or Julia, by which the film again suggests that Charles cannot choose both. He decides to follow Julia, and inherently rejects Sebastian, which he will do again later when Sebastian tries to kiss him at Julia and Rex's engagement party, after which Sebastian exclaims that "[Charles doesn't] care about [him], all [he] ever wanted was to sleep with [his] sister." Most homosexual aspects from the novel and the series are left out in the film, except for these rejections. The film thus upholds the current status quo in which heterosexuality functions as a norm and homosexuality as deviant from that norm.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that even though *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) and both on-screen adaptations convey the same fabula, their approaches to the representation of Charles's (sexual) interest differ greatly. Analysed within the framework of narratology, the novel presents his homoerotic friendship with Sebastian as the forerunner for his heterosexual relationship with Julia, which in turn functions as the precursor for Charles's religious

conversion. The issue of sexuality in the novel is therefore employed in order to show its insignificant nature, and to foreground the importance of religious conversion instead. Hence, one could argue that it is neither Sebastian nor Julia, but sexuality in general which serves as the forerunner for the highest goal: faith in God.

Whereas the novel focuses mostly on Charles's religious interest, the 1981 series adaptation redirects Charles's focus from religion to sexuality, and within the latter towards homosexuality. Even though the script stays close to the novel, Charles's general interest in Sebastian and his family shifts towards a sexual focus on Sebastian. Through a comparative analysis of the novel and the series, I have argued that the series creates a more openly homosexual atmosphere by carefully staging the introduction of the younger Sebastian in the embedded story, and omitting certain passages that involve Julia.

Finally, Charles's sexual orientation shifts towards a heterosexual, or even heteronormative relationship with Julia in the 2008 film adaptation. Whereas the series follows the storyline of the novel almost to the letter, the film inserts meaningful structural changes which greatly influence Charles's sexual focus, both within the primary as well as the embedded story. Most notably, the boat scene from the end of the novel occurs just before the primary story is supposed to merge into the embedded story. During this scene, Julia becomes the eroticized object of Charles's gaze, whereas in the series Sebastian fulfilled this function. Within the embedded story, the Venice scene is also restructured: whereas Charles and Sebastian travel to Venice by themselves in the novel and in the series, Julia joins them in the film. The added masked ball scene is crucial since it is where Sebastian finds Charles and Julia kissing, and Charles inherently rejects Sebastian. By foregrounding Julia and making Charles reject Sebastian multiple times, the film establishes a heterosexual norm that was present neither in the novel nor in the series. The underlying heteronormative tone is set early on in the film, when cousin Jasper uses the word "sodomite" to describe the sight of Sebastian and Anthony in a gondola.

This analysis shows that sexuality is a social construction that changes over time and offers a counter-image to the prevailing assumption that our society has become more sexually tolerant. Hence, not only *Brideshead* has been revisited through the years, but both Charles's religion and relationships as well.

ROLE OF THE STUDENT

Anne Verhoef was an undergraduate student of the bachelor's program "Literature and Society: English" at the VU in Amsterdam. During the course of her thesis trajectory she was working under the supervision of dr. Roel van den Oever.

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